

The Title

Introduction to Public education in Saudi Arabia

By Saud Albeshir

## **Introduction**

Education is the key to ensuring the future. Countries spend tens of billions of dollars every year on primary education because the governments know having better individuals in their societies requires active education systems. For example, in 2013, Americans spent \$620 billion on K–12 public educations, and the average cost to educate each child was \$12,296 (Kena et al., 2016). Many countries around the world compete to provide the best practices and theories for their schoolchildren. Evidence has proven that education is the solution to reducing conflicts, improving people's health conditions, and even alleviating poverty in societies. For instance, Singapore paid attention to education, and the per capita income has increased dramatically from \$428 in 1960 to \$56,284 in 2014 (Kim,2015). Therefore, with no doubt, education the best weapon to fight in this world.

The purpose of this book is to inform educators and researchers who are interested in the public education of Saudi Arabia with the most critical topics that

impact schools. I was a Saudi international student at Cleveland State University (CSU) in the United States of America. That time, my American classmates in the college education of where I used to study my master's in educational leadership, had many questions about public education in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I decided to write a guidebook on the public-school system to cover the most frequent issues in schools there. I hope you will learn something from this book.

## Contents

Chapter One : The Story of public schools

Chapter Two: Educational System in Saudi Arabia

Chapter Three: The system of education careers

Chapter Four: The Government and education

Chapter Five Public Education Challenges

Chapter Six: General Information on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



### **The Story of public schools**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) was established in 1932, and since that time the government of the country has had a sincere belief that education is the key to open future doors. Before creating the Ministry of Education in 1953, there were many attempts by the society and the government to educate children and reduce the illiteracy rate which was very high (the official website of the ministry of education in the KSA [ ME, 2018]). Historically, many Arab families sent their boys to learn the basics of religion, reading, and writing in a place called Kuttatebe, but girls at that time were less likely to have the opportunity for education. However, there were tens of women who could read and write; mainly in urban areas such as Mecca and Jeddah.

In the Kuttatebe, students learned the traditional forms of knowledge, like memorizing parts of the Holy Quran and understanding Islamic teachings.

Teachers were usually religious men who had mastered the essential skills of the time like reading and writing. Kuttatebe was a private school, so only boys from

wealthy or middle-class families could afford the price of a teacher, which was mostly paid in foods such as dates or bread.



Kuttatebe

The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

Readers need to know that the western province, or Hijaz, of the Kingdom, has a unique history compared to other regions of the country because the two holiest sites for Muslims are there. Hijaz hosts millions of Muslims worldwide every year. Pilgrims from multiple nations and cultures visit Mecca, which is the most sacred site for Muslims and Al-Medina. This is where the prophet Muhammad (peace be

upon him) (571- 632) is buried. Hence, Hijaz was well developed compared to other districts of the KSA at that time.

Due to pilgrims, education in Hijaz was affordable in a few places, especially places of worship like mosques. Students studied religious subjects like reading the Holy Quran and listening to stories about the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In 1858, a group of Indian pilgrims established the first modern school in Mecca with full funding coming from an Indian Muslim scholar (ME, 2018). The school started inside the Great Mosque of Mecca; later it moved to another building in Mecca. The school was called Al-Soltiah, and it taught Islamic subjects, Arabic, and science. In 1864, an Indian scholar created the second formal school in Mecca and applied the same system of education as in Al-Soltiah. The third formal school in Hijaz opened in Jeddah in 1905 (ME, 2018). Jeddah is the closest port to Mecca (43 miles) and the port where pilgrims arrive by ship.

King Abdul Aziz believed that education was one of the central foundations for the establishment of a strong nation. The king founded the Directorate of Knowledge in 1923 (ME, 2018). The first step of formal education started even before some of the regions joined to unite with the founder, King Abdul Aziz, and declared to be an official country in 1932 under the name The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



Educators who worked with the Directorate of Knowledge were responsible for only four schools, which were the total number of schools in the entire country. In 1926, the Directorate of Knowledge also built 12 schools in the main cities of the country. By 1952, the total number of schools was 306 in the KSA (ME, 2018).

In 1953, the king of the country at that time, Saud, ordered a change of the Directorate of Knowledge into a Ministry of Knowledge (ME, 2018). The government supported the new ministry with a large budget because the illiteracy rate was high among Saudis. Also, the government wanted to enlighten and modernize the people to be able to coexist with the new economy, especially after the discovery of oil in the country. The first Minister of Knowledge was Prince Fahad, before he became the king of the country.



Prince Fahad

The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

It is important to mention that the name of the Ministry of Education has changed three times in almost 65 years. However, the function of the ministry is still the same, which promotes education, build schools, and reduces illiteracy in the society. In 2003, the King Fahad, who was the first Minister of Knowledge, ordered the name of the ministry to be changed to the Ministry of Education (ME, 2018).

### **Women's Education in Saudi Arabia**

Teaching females in schools were not an easy task for the Saudi government at that time. The families who were fundamentalists believed these schools would corrupt their girls and teach them immorality. These families thought schools would change the values of the society and encourage modernity's. Historically, fundamentalists in the KSA were against some of the government orders because the government helps modernization in social and economic aspects. For instance, fundamentalists were against opening the first official TV network, in 1962, and against sending girls to public schools (ME, 2018).

King Faisal and his government encouraged families to send their girls to schools. Also, the government sent many groups of employees to countryside's who still live in deserts that time to explain the importance of girls' education for the

society. The government explained to the society in schools that girls would learn religions, reading, writing, and preparing to be a good mother for the next generation of the nation. However, many families disagreed to send their girls to schools in the first years of formal education for females.

King Faisal the leader of the country that time insisted on teaching women despite the rejection of society. The king did not force families to send their children to public schools. At the same time, the King ordered the building of hundreds of schools for females to make education affordable for those who want to learn. It is essential to know that formal education is not compulsory in the KSA but accessible for free in all districts of the country (ME, 2018).



King Faisal

The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

The official start of girls' education in the KSA was 1959, when the King ordered the building of schools for girls at all levels of education. In 1960, the government created The General Presidency for Girls' Education to function as the ministry of education for girls. The leaders of The General Presidency for Girls (GPG) worked hard to open schools, and they opened 15 elementary schools for girls in 1960. In the same year, GPG also opened a school to prepare female teachers to teach in girls' public schools and accepted 21 students who graduated from private schools. In 1963, the GPG opened the first girls' public school in the country in Mecca. By 1981, the number of girls and boys in public schools was almost equal which meant a high success for the government that wants the best for its citizens and to empower women in the community (ME, 2018).

It is important to mention that there were a few private schools for girls before public schooling for girls was established in 1959. For example, Dar-Alhanan school in Jeddah is the first modern private school for girls in the KSA, and it was established in 1955. Dar-Alhanan was entirely supported and funded by Queen Iffat, the wife of King Faisal. Furthermore, some rich families sent their children to be educated abroad. Egypt and Lebanon were the top-choice countries that Saudi

families chose for their children because they used to have effective educational systems and were developed countries compared to the KSA at that time.



Dar-Alhanan School

The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

The General Presidency of Girls' Education acted historical role to enlightenment hundreds of thousands of Saudis females for 42 years before merging with the Ministry of Education in 2002. Currently, Saudi public schools have more female teachers than males' teachers. Further, the number of Saudi females who graduate from universities than males (ME, 2018).

### **The Government and education**

The Saudi government has fully supported education since King Abdelaziz united the country. The government fully funds the Ministry of Education and the building of public schools. Readers need to know that the government does not charge the citizens taxes. The government also supports needy students with a monthly payment, so these students will not have to leave school and work to feed themselves. Students with disabilities also receive a monthly salary from the government along with free transportation and other access to help these students learn skills such as Braille.

Not only does the government support primary education, but it also funded many public universities and colleges that cover all areas of the KSA. In 2015, there were 1,527,769 students in public higher education and all of these students studied for free (General Authority for Statistics in the KSA [ GAS, 2018]). At the same time, the government supports all students in higher education with a monthly salary. Moreover, the government is sending thousands of citizens to complete their higher education at top universities around the world. In 2014, almost 115,000 Saudi students studied abroad in 22 countries (GAS, 2018). The government paid full tuition for these students and also supports them with salaries. It is clear that the government of Saudi Arabia has a deep belief that education is the way to develop the country. Due to this belief, it has spent billions of dollars to invest in the Saudi people.

### **Special education**

The first official launch of special education services for disabled people in Saudi Arabia was in 1962 when the first public administration for the disabled was established in the ministry of education (ME, 2018). Before, in 1962, there was only one official Institute for Blind Students in 1960 in the capital, Riyadh. It is fair

to mention that Abdullah Al-Ghanim is considered the godfather of special education in Saudi Arabia where he participated in the opening of many schools for the blind around the country. Al-Ghanim also supported to apply the Arab Braille method, which is an educational aid to assist this group of students to read by touching symbols in the Kingdom. It is interesting to know that Ahmed Al-Bahsin imported the Arab Braille method in 1977 from Iraq to help his blind child learn. Later, Al-Bahsin taught a group of educators who deal with the Arabi Braille alphabet, and one of Al-Bahsin's students was Al-Ghanim, who believed deeply in the abilities of blind students.

After establishing the department of special education in the ministry of education, numbers of schools and programs that aimed to educate children with all types of disabilities increased sharply. For illustration, in 1964, the department of special education opened the first Institute for Deaf Students in Riyadh with two buildings; one for girls and the other for boys. Deaf students in this institution study subjects through Arabic sign language, which is totally different from American sign language. The last group of disabled students the ministry of education served was learners with autism. In 1996, the ministry opened three programs to help students with autism (ME, 2018).



Programs and institutes of students with disabilities started in isolated schools, so these schools have only a group of students, such as only deaf students, in a special school building. Historically, isolated schools were a common way to teach students with disabilities around the world even in first-world countries like the USA. Happily, in 1996, the leaders of the Ministry of Education started the integration of students with disabilities into normal schools (ME, 2018).

According to government data, the disability rate in Saudi Arabia is between 7 and 10 percent of the population of nearly 33 million people. Marriage to relatives may be a cause of high disability in the country because it is very common, so the government encourages pre-marital medical examination to try to reduce genetic disability as far as possible. In 2011, the total number of disabled students in public schools was 39,745 boys and 16,731 girls (ME, 2018). These students were divided into eight types of special academic programs covering the entire territory of the country.

The academic programs that the public schools provide are for students who are hearing impaired, visually impaired, learning disabilities, and learners with multiple disabilities. Moreover, the schools serve students who are

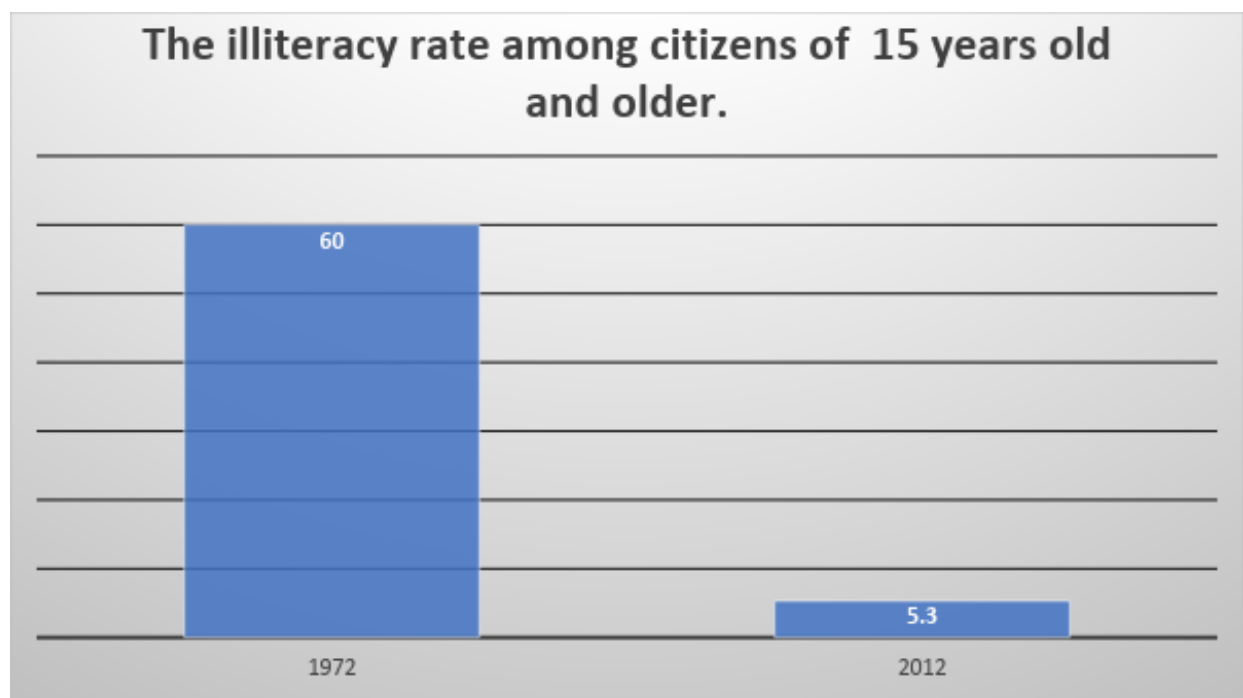
emotionally unstable, autistic, communicatively impaired, and physically disabled. The ministry also serves minor mentally retarded students academically. The total number of special education programs was 3,926 in 2011. All disabled students in the country receive a monthly salary from the government, free transportation, and free breakfast in their schools. The government also provides all education aids to these students, such as hearing aids for deaf children and braille printers for students with visual issues. Readers need to know that the ministry of education gives a financial advantage to teachers who work with disabled children to motivate them (ME, 2018).

### **Illiteracy**

The Ministry of Education created a particular administration for adult education and literacy in 1958 (ME, 2018). It was called the Department of Popular Culture, which was connected to the administration of primary schools in the Ministry of Education. Before that time, the rate of illiteracy was high among the people of the KSA in most regions. Historically, in the first years of the formal education in the KSA, many people did not value modern schooling because they needed their children to work with them because of poverty. Also, a significant number of the Bedouins were continually moving from one place to another to find sources of

water, so their children missed the opportunity for stability and admission in a school.

In 1972, the leader of the country, King Faisal, approved the adult education and literacy system, which encouraged citizens to learn basic educational skills, such as reading and writing. The government also encouraged the people who served in the public sectors, like soldiers and workers, to study. This gave them financial advantages after finishing each level of school (ME, 2018).



The government hugely succeeded in reducing illiteracy among Saudis in a short time. In 1972, 60% of people 15 years and over could not read or write, but that dropped to 5.3% (same age group) in 2012. Also, in 2012, 98.7% of children between 6 and 15 years were school students. The Ministry of Education offered several programs to reduce the illiteracy rate, such as summer camps and classes throughout the year, and the number of academic courses provided for literacy was 3,706 in 2012, which covered all the territories of the country (ME, 2018).

## **CHAPTER2**

### **Educational System in Saudi Arabia**

#### **The purpose of education**

The purpose of education is to understand Islam correctly, to instill and promote the Islamic faith, to instill students with Islamic values and teachings, and to provide them with knowledge and skills to develop useful behavioral aims to

strengthen society economically, socially, and culturally, and to prepare individuals to be beneficial members of society (ME, 2018).

### **Ministry of Education Vision and Mission Statements**

#### **Vision statement:**

Distinguished learning to build an educated society that can compete globally (ME, 2018).

#### **Mission Statement**

To provide the opportunity for education for all in an appropriate educational environment in the light of the educational system of the Kingdom, raising the quality of its products, increasing the effectiveness of scientific research, encouraging creativity and innovation, developing community partnerships, and improving the skills and abilities of education personnel (ME, 2018).

### **The general foundations of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

- ❖ The general foundations of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are a belief in Allah (the God) as Lord, the Islam religion, and Muhammad. Peace be upon him, a prophet of Allah.

- ❖ The ideals of Islam for the establishment of human civilization are rational, constructive, and guided by the message of Muhammad. Peace be upon him to achieve a good life in this world and survival in the afterlife.
- ❖ We believe in the human dignity that the Holy Quran has decreed and entrusted to the faithful of God on Earth.
- ❖ Opportunities are available to students to contribute to the development of the society in which they live. Thus, they will benefit from the development in which they participate.
- ❖ The government has to encourage students to learn about their religion at all levels of education.
- ❖ Religious sciences are essential in all years of primary, intermediate, and secondary education, and Islamic culture is essential in all years of higher education.
- ❖ Students benefit from all kinds of useful human knowledge in the light of Islam, which they can use to raise the nation and its standard of living.
- ❖ The use of technology and the sciences is promoted as one of the most important means of cultural, social, economic, and health development to elevate our nation, our country, and our role in global cultural progress.

- ❖ Education is linked at all stages of the general development plan of the state.
- ❖ There is a conscious interaction with global cultural developments in the fields of science, culture, and literature by following and participating in them and directing them to the benefit of society and to the good and progress of humanity.
- ❖ Students learn respect for the public rights that Islam guaranteed to preserve security and to achieve the stability of the society.
- ❖ Social solidarity is formed among the members of society through cooperation, love, brotherhood, and prioritizing of public interest.
- ❖ The character of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is distinguished by its protection of the sanctities of Islam, its preservation of the sanctuary of revelation, and its adoption of Islam as a doctrine, worship and law, a constitution of life, and a sense of its great responsibilities in leading humanity to Islam and guiding it toward the good.
- ❖ Arabic is the language of instruction in all subjects and all stages except when it is necessary to teach it in another language (ME, 2018).

## **Religion and education**

Unlike the secular education system in Western countries, the general foundations of education in Saudi Arabia depend on Islamic teachings. Schools teach religion intensively at all levels of education. Students in public schools take an average of 12 classes a week that discuss topics on the religion of Islam. Also, students and teachers do the noon prayer in all public schools every day.

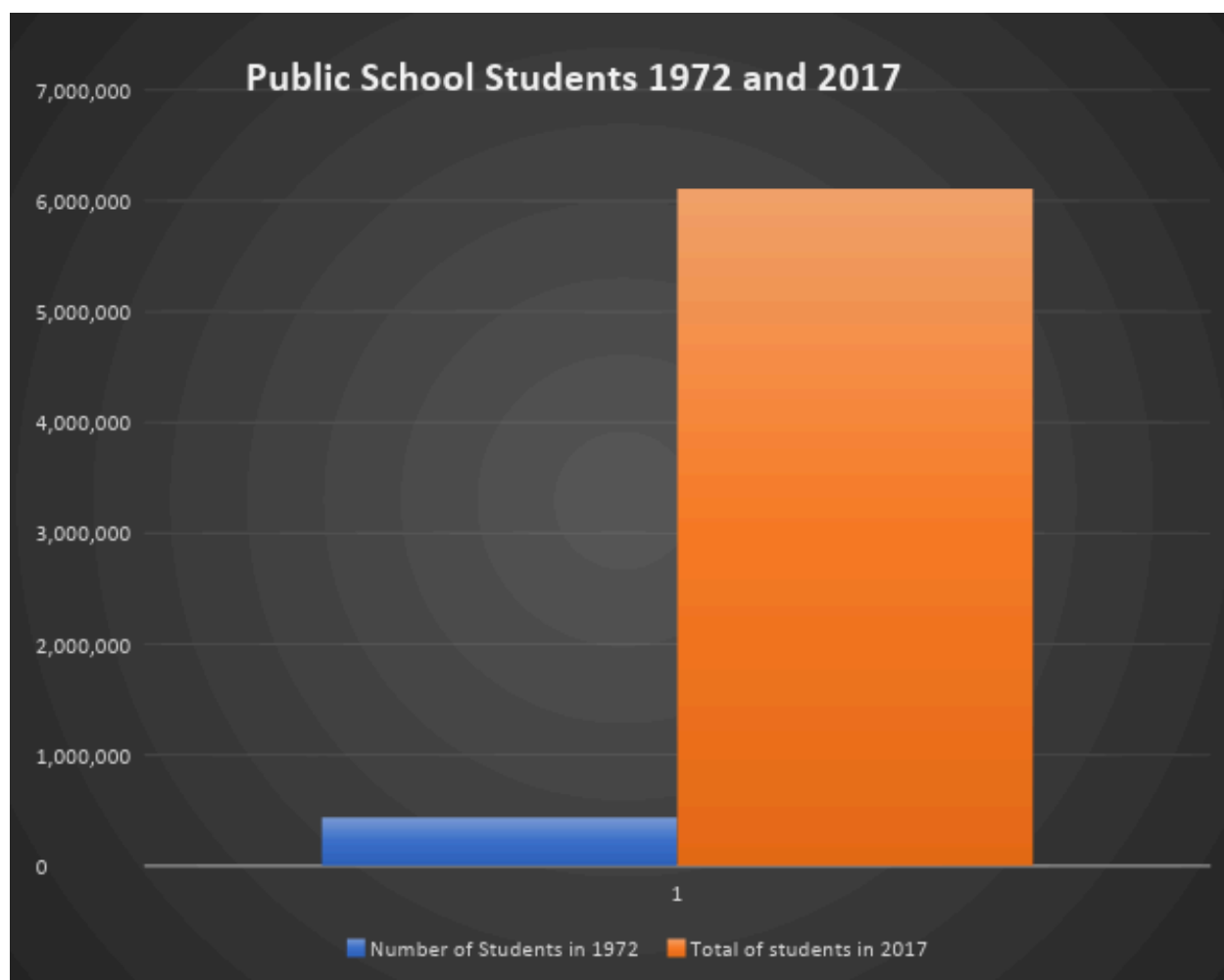
Public schools do not teach students philosophy and theories that are contrary to the Islamic religion, such as Darwin's theory of evolution. Moreover, boys and girls study in different school buildings; boys with boys and girls with girls to obey the Islamic guidance. Female pupils in middle and high schools are required to wear an Islamic dress that covers their hair when riding on school buses and when they come and leave school.

## **Education Funding**

In the KSA, the government is fully funding the ministry of education to operate public schools and public higher education institutes. The government wholly finances public schools including all components of schoolhouses such as facilities, teacher and staff salaries, building operation costs, student books, and monthly payments for students with disabilities. Unlike governments of most countries, the



Saudi government does not charge taxes on residents at all, which means that all costs of public education come from the general state budget. As shown in budget tables, the ministry is spending more money every year due to the enormous increase in the number of public school students. It is important to know that this budget for primary education (K-12) only, and the money for higher education is not included in the table (ME, 2018).



Budget of the Ministry of Education (K-12 only) In Saudi Riyal

1\$ = 3.75 Riyal (ME, 2018).

2010

90,000620,000

2011	94.656,037,000
2012	101,466,583,000
2013	118,425,732,000
2014	121,253,000,000
2015	127,442,168,000
2016	124,319,484,000

### **The Minister of Education**

The Minister of Education is the chief government official on education in the country and he appointed by order of the King. In 2015, the King ordered the integration of the Ministries of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education into a single department called the Ministry of Education. The role of the minister is to make decisions and observe all level of education including public and private schools and universities. Ten ministers have led education of Saudi Arabia, and the

first minister was Prince Fahd before he became the king of the country. The current minister is Dr. Ahmed Al-Issa (ME, 2018).



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

### **Educational Levels in Saudi Public schools**

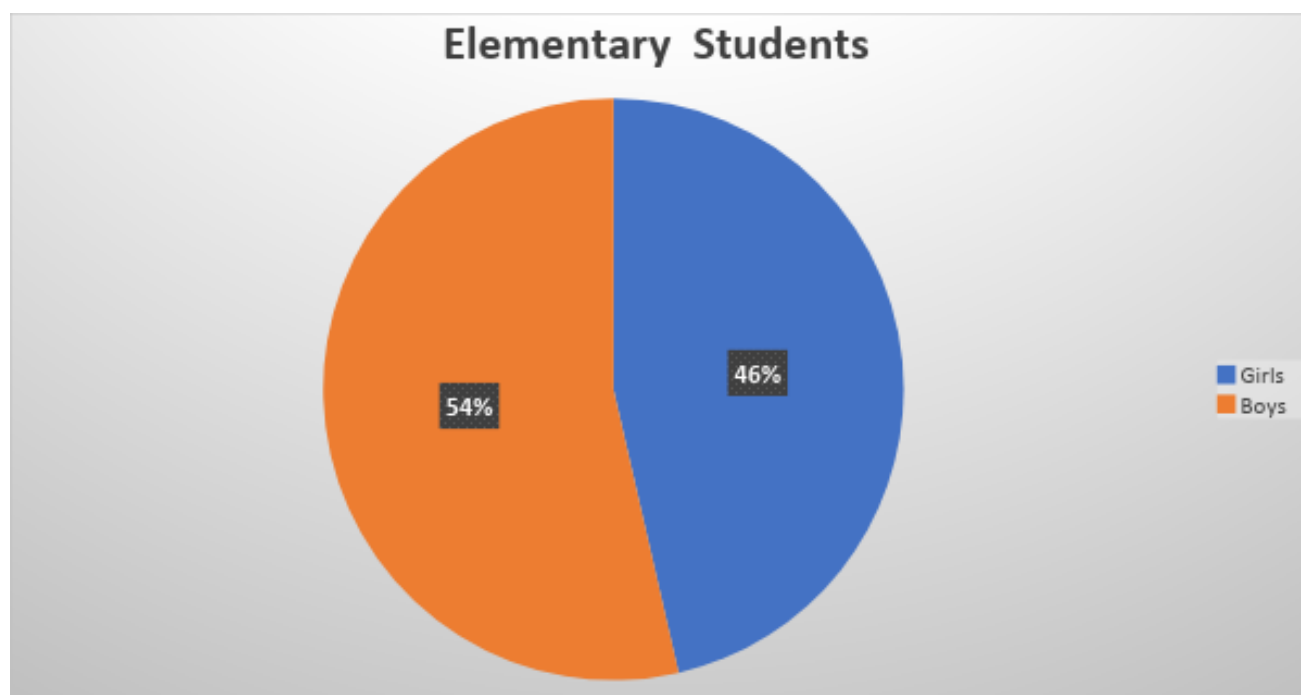
pre-primary education

The last recent years, the Ministry of Education has opened tens of pre-primary education schools, but the schools for this stage still are not enough for all children. Accordingly, the percentage of students in this stage is a way less

than primary education. In these schools, students from the age of three to five learn essential skills in life such as using the bathroom by themselves. Also, teachers who are only female prepare young male and female children psychologically, academically and intellectually to move to elementary schools (ME, 2018).

### Elementary schools

Elementary schools serve students from six years old. Saudi elementary schools have six grades, and the total number of students in elementary public schools in 2017 was 3,166,986 students, and 1,559,954 of these students were females. It is essential to remember that there is separation based on gender in schools in the KSA in levels of educations except for preschools. The number of public elementary schools in 2017 was 6322 schools for girls and 6339 for boys.



The academic year usually starts in September and ends on the first day of May. Elementary students study two semesters a year, and each semester is 16 weeks. Also, students enjoy two to three short holidays during the academic year.

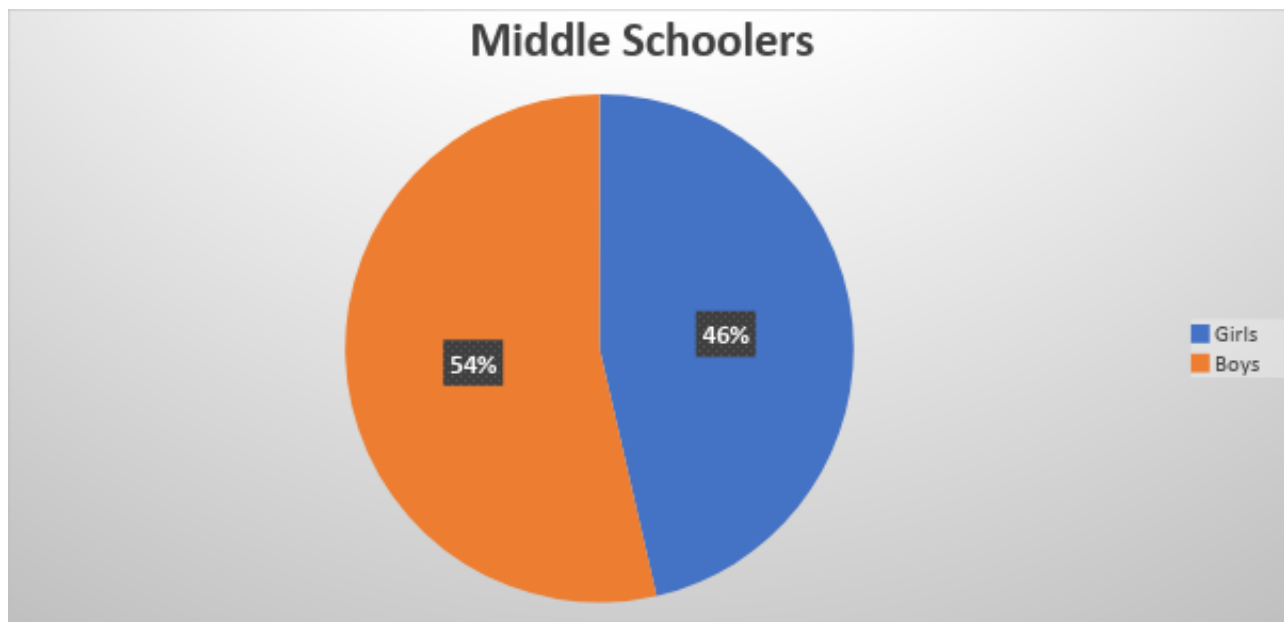
The first day of the school week is Sunday, and students spend five days in school. The students spend their day in school from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. During this time, they have two breaks. The first one is in the morning to eat their snacks and play with their friends. The second break is for noon prayer.

Elementary students have six classes a day, and the length of each course is 45 minutes. At this level, pupils study many subjects, including math, science,

religion, and English. The students need to succeed in six academic years to move on to middle school (ME, 2018).

### **Middle schools**

After finishing elementary school, students move to middle schools to spend three academic years. In 2017, The total number of male and female students in public middle schools was 1,473,413, and the number of males was 752,353. The number of public middle schools increased sharply in recent years. In 2017, there were 3683 females and 3897 male schools that served all areas of the country.



Middle schoolers study 36 weeks a year, which is divided into two semesters. They commonly begin the academic year in September and end in May. All students in public schools follow the ministry of education, so schools start and finish together around the country. Students at this level of schooling spend five days a week, beginning on Sunday, and enjoy two days of the weekend, which are Friday and Saturday.

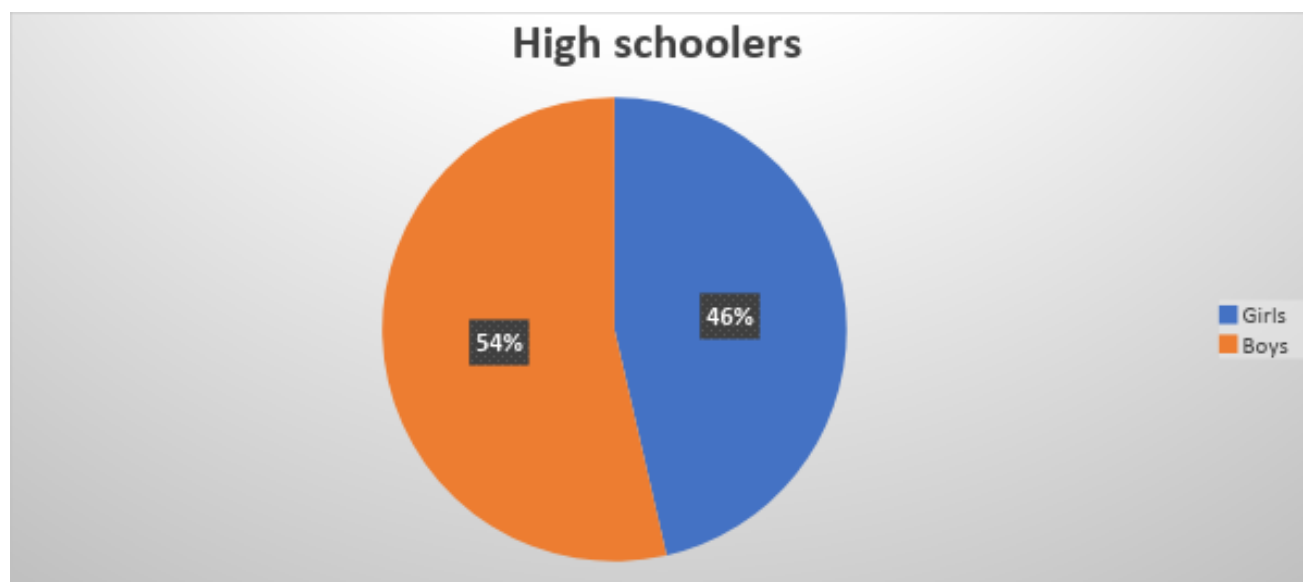
Middle schoolers take more exams than elementary students and they face more challenging tasks. Students learn many subjects in middle school, such as science, mathematics, religion, history, geography, and linguistics. The school day starts at 7 a.m. and goes until 2 p.m., and students do eight periods of classes; each one is 45 minutes. There are two break times for the students. The first break is in the morning, which is 30 minutes, and the students can have some snacks and comfort. The second break is for noon praying at the end of the school day, and students pray together in a praying room inside the school building (ME, 2018).

### High schools

Students who finish middle school years successfully move to high schools in order to spend three more academic years. The total number of high schoolers



in 2017 was 1,468,913 students, and 787,468 of the students were boys. In 2017, the number of female public high schools was 2,028 while the number of male schools was 1,966.



The high schoolers start their academic year in September and finish in May. They study two semesters a year, and each semester is 18 weeks long. The students begin their school day from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m. During this time, they study eight classes a day and have two breaks just like middle schoolers.

The high school stage is critical for students who plan to go into higher education, and learners work hard to make high grades. In the Saudi education system, high school students need to achieve an appropriate level of education in order to be admitted to higher education institutions. Students are measured by

their last years' grade point average in high school, as well as by taking two other tests similar to the SAT and ACT in the U.S.

All students in their first year of high school study the same subjects, including religion, science, English, and other social sciences. Students in high schools, in general, have more exams in high school compared to middle school. In their second year of high school, students need to choose their track, and schools mostly provide two options of major. The first one is the science track and the second one is religious studies. Students who choose the science track study scientific subjects intensively, such as physics, geology, chemistry, biology, and mathematics. On the other hand, students who choose the religious track learn the Arabic language, Islamic faith, and social sciences intensively (ME, 2018).

### **Curriculums**

The Ministry of Education applies the national curriculum module to all the public schools in the country. All students, female and male, in all districts study from the exact same textbooks that are published by the ministry for free. The ministry has experts and scholars that design and writes textbooks for students in all fields and all grades.

Experts who work on the committee of national curriculums try to cover the most important topics that students can benefit from in the sciences and arts. For example, students will study math, science, fine art, and languages. Teachers also receive teachers' books from the committee of national curriculums to help them understand the best way to teach the lessons and to identify the lesson goals.

It is important to remember that the foundations of education in Saudi Arabia are Islamic and all school books follow the philosophy of Islam. Students in all grades study religion intensively while in school. For example, on a daily basis, students learn the Islamic creed and read the holy book of the Muslim Quran.

Saudi public schools don't teach topics that leaders of the ministry of education believe are incompatible with the religion of Islam. For example, students have the opportunity to study philosophy because it discusses topics regarding theology and the universe. Also, students do not learn theories at odds with Islamic viewpoints, such as Darwin's theory of evolution.

In recent years, education leaders have introduced ways to modernize the idea of design books and start using technology and social media sites to make learning more accessible to students. Today, the ministry posted all lessons in the national curricula on YouTube, so when a student misses a school day, he or she

will have an opportunity to learn online. Also, the ministry is working on a plan to give each student a tablet that has all the books they need to have a good academic performance.

## CHAPTER 3

### **The system of education careers**

The system of education careers has been implemented applied by the Ministry of Civil Services since 1981. It is the method the mastery of education has followed to fill their schools with teachers and personnel. The system has 12 articles that describe the many jobs and qualifications that are related to education. From these articles, the most important topics from these articles are how to become a teacher, a principal, the wages of teachers, and the retirement of people who serve in public schools (ME, 2018).

The procedure to hire teachers in public schools

As previously mentioned, the system was applied in 1981, and it contains articles that the Ministry of Education is no longer using, such as employing teachers and how an associate degree is earned, because of that, the focus will be on sections that are still used in this policy.

Individuals who like to be teachers in public schools have to earn a bachelor's degree or higher from proper colleges. Also, the future teachers must have no criminal record, like sexual harassment. The potential teachers also need to be healthy and not use illegal drugs.

Also, the Ministry of Education has added more procedures to select teachers for public schools in recent years, so there are three main steps to becoming a teacher. First, the potential teacher has to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. Students who graduated from education colleges are more likely to be hired than others who graduated from arts and science colleges.

Second, potential teachers have to take and pass a test. This test contains questions on education theories, psychology, Arabic language, and the potential teachers' majors. For example, those who majored in English will have a different test from those who majored in math. Test takers need to get 60 points out of 100

to pass. Those who pass will continue with the process, while those who do not will have to wait for one academic year to retake the test.

Third, the leaders of the Ministry of Education will interview the potential teachers to make sure that they are fit to teach in schools. The leaders usually ask questions on specific topics, like education issues related to the schools. They also consider the candidate's proficiency in Arabic, which is the formal language in the KSA, and technological skills. By passing the interview, the applicants complete their part, and then they wait to be hired by the Ministry of Education. Individuals who do not pass the interview will have another opportunity to redo the interview next year.

After interviewing all potential teachers who meet all requirements of being a teacher in public schools, the Ministry of Education sends the information of these candidates into the Ministry of Civil Service. Employees in the Ministry of Civil Service will organize information and rank each candidate with a certain number. The reason for ranking candidate is that thousands of qualifying individuals want to work as a teacher. People who are waiting for long years will receive more points each year so that they are more likely to hire than individuals who just finished college, especially in some majors. For example, there are

thousands who majored in Arabic waiting for years to find an opportunity to be a teacher. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education struggles to find individuals who majored in English.

Later, the Ministry of Civil Service declares the names of new teachers in the public newspapers and social media based on the need for schools. In most cases, the Ministry of Civil Service hires up to 15000 new female and male teachers every academic year. The new teachers will distribute in schools in all regions and cities of the KSA. Many new teachers will work in different cities far away from their hometowns and serve there for a number of years until they find a place in public schools in their community.

### School principals

According to the system, teachers who plan to become school principals and assistant principals need to meet only two requirements. First, they need to have three years of teaching experience. Second, they need to have earned a good evaluation grade during these three years. Unlike leaders of schools in the USA, principals and assistant principals in Saudi public schools receive the same salary as teachers, which means there is no financial benefit from being a school leader.

## Salaries

Saudi public education is central. All schools receive funding from one source, which is the government via the Ministry of Education. The salaries system applies on all teachers and principals in all public schools in all cities and regions. There is no salary difference between teachers who serve in an expensive city and others who teach in a small town. There is no wage difference between male and female teachers (ME, 2018).

The salary scale depends on seniority at work. Teachers who have spent long years in teaching get more money than others who have fewer years of experience. The salary scale also gives a higher salary to teachers who graduated from the colleges of education and teachers who have completed a master's degree.

### Teacher Monthly salary schedule

Teacher salary schedule divided into three sections. The first section is teachers who do not have an educational qualification but still have the bachelor's degree. The second is teachers who graduated from colleges of education and thirdly, teachers who have a master's degree in education. To facilities reading the



schedule for the reading, all salaries will be exchanged form Saudi Riyal into the U.S. dollar (ME, 2018).

Year of teaching	Teachers with no educational degree	Teacher G from Education Colleges	Teachers with Master Degree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All salaries in U.S. dollar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All salaries in U.S. dollar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All salaries in U.S. dollar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All salaries in U.S. dollar.</li> </ul>
1.	2019	2149	2469
2.	2245	2285	2725
3.	2381	2421	2990
4.	2517	2557	3246
5.	2653	2693	3502

6.	2789	2829	3758
7.	2925	2965	4014
8.	3061	3101	4240
9.	3197	3237	4526
10.	3333	3373	4782
11.	3469	3509	5035
12.	3605	3645	5294
13.	3741	3781	5550
14.	3877	3917	5806
15.	4013	4053	6062
16.	4149	4189	6318
17.	4285	4325	6574
18.	4421	4461	6830
19.	4557	4597	7086
20.	4693	4733	7342

21.	4829	4869	7598
22.	4965	5005	7854
23.	5101	5141	8110
24.	5237	5277	8366
25.	5373	5413	8622

### Teachers' Retirement

Teachers and administrators in public schools can retire after serving 20 years. It is common to see teachers in KSA retire in their early 40s in many schools. Retired teachers who worked for 20 years still receive a big amount of money, which is 50% of the last year's salary, before they quit working. Moreover, teachers who labor more will earn more money during retirement.

The retirement system causes many problems for the government because it is very old, and life expectancy is increasing among Saudis. That means these individuals will receive money for a long time before they pass away in most cases. The government will replace the system of retirement soon, so teachers will need

to serve at least 25 years to get 50% of the last year's wages before they quit working (ME, 2018).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **The Government and education**

The Saudi government has fully supported education since King Abdelaziz united the country. The government fully funds the Ministry of Education and the building of public schools. Readers need to know that the government does not charge the citizens taxes. The government also supports needy students with a monthly payment, so these students will not have to leave school and work to feed themselves. Students with disabilities also receive a monthly salary from the government along with free transportation and other access to help these students learn skills such as Braille.

Not only does the government support primary education, but it also funded many public universities and colleges that cover all areas of the KSA. In 2015, there were 1,527,769 students in public higher education and all of these

students studied for free. At the same time, the government supports all students in higher education with a monthly salary. Moreover, the government is sending thousands of citizens to complete their higher education at top universities around the world. In 2014, almost 115,000 Saudi students studied abroad in 22 countries. The government paid full tuition for these students and also supports them with salaries. It is clear that the government of Saudi Arabia has a deep belief that education is the way to develop the country. Due to this belief, it has spent billions of dollars to invest in the Saudi people (GAS, 2018).

### **Kings and Education**

The royal family of Saudi Arabia ruled the vast regions of the Arabian Peninsula since 1744; however, the country was defeated by the Ottoman Empire and its allies in 1891. In 1902, King Abdelaziz bin Abdul-Rahman Al Saud succeeded to restore Riyadh the current capital of Saudi Arabia, and the king set out to unite the regions in the Arabian Peninsula. After an extended period of battles and political compromises, King Abdelaziz Al-Saud united large regions of the Arabian Peninsula in 1932—nearly 2,150,000 km<sup>2</sup> under the name, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Therefore, King Abdelaziz was the founder of the KSA (ME, 2018).



## King Saud

Seven kings have led the country after the death of King Abdelaziz in 1953, and all of the kings were King Abdulaziz's sons. The second king of KSA was Saud. King Saud led the country from 1953 to 1964. King Saud is considered the godfather of education in KSA. During his leadership, King Saud established the Ministry of Knowledge which became the Ministry of Education in 1953. Additionally, his majesty ordered to open the first university in the Arabian peninsula in 1957 which today is called King Saud University at Riyadh (ME, 2018).

The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

### **King Faisal**

In 1964, King Faisal was named to rule the KSA. King Faisal contributed to the growth of education, notably higher education where public higher education was affordable for students in many regions of the KSA. His Majesty also placed a plan to reduce the level of illiteracy in the country, which was high (ME, 2018).



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

### **King Khalid**

Sadly, in 1975, King Faisal was killed by his nephew, and his brother, Khalid, was named the King of the KSA. During the leadership of King Khalid, the economy of the country grew in a fast way due to the increase of oil prices in the global market, and that helped the government send thousands of Saudi citizens to get their higher education abroad in first-world countries like the United States of America and Great Britain. Also, during that time, tens of colleges and hundreds of public schools were built in the KSA (ME, 2018).





The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

### **King Fahad**

In 1982, Fahad was nominated the King of the KSA after his brother, Khalid, had passed away. King Fahad had a close connection with the education system because he was the first minister of education in 1953. Schools and higher education institutions continued to grow during King Fahad's administration (ME, 2018).



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

### **King Abdullah**

In 2015, King Abdullah became the leader of the KSA. Like his brother, the king focused heavily on education. During his leadership, 12 public universities were founded that provided free access for citizens to complete their higher education.



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

Besides that, King Abdullah created an important program to give Saudis the opportunity to study overseas at the best universities in the world. This program has opened the door for thousands of Saudis from different economic statuses to travel and learn English or other languages. Students have begun to apply to receive admission and study for bachelor's or graduate degrees.

The program is called the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KSP), and it provides all the support students need like health insurance and monthly payments for all students who have this scholarship, which the government fully funds. A total of

127,000 students in 32 countries have received this scholarship, and the KSP is recognized as the biggest program that sends students overseas on government funding in human history (ME, 2018).

### **King Salman**

King Salman like his kings' brothers, supported the education in the country. In 2015, the King ordered the integration of the Ministries of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education into a single department called the Ministry of Education. The following tables explained the success of education in the country in 2017.



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

<b>Facts on Education (GAS, 2018).</b>	
Total number of Elementary public-school students	Females 1559954 Males 1607032 3166986
Total number of Middle public school students	Males 752353 Females 721060 1473413
Total number of High public-school students	Males 787468 Females 681445 1468913
Total number of public school students	Females 2,962,459 Males 3,246,853 6,109,312
Total number of Public schools	Females 14046 Males 12202

	26,248
Total number of Private schools	Females 2,796 Males 1,581 4377
The illiteracy rate among 15 years and older	5.3% in 2012
Percentage who attend schools in schools 7 -15 years	More than 98%
Total number of public school teachers	Females 243,444 Males 197,724 441,168

The Biggest Universities in the Country in 2017 (GAS, 2018)	
University	Students
King Faisal University	187,663

King Abdelaziz University	169,202
Imam University	107,607
Umm Al-Quora University	101,607
Qassim University	66,333
Total of Universities	30 public Universities  12 Private Universities
First University	King Saud University  EST 1957  49,555 students
Total students in Higher Education in  2017	1.341,331  Females 695,985

	Males 645,340
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## CHAPTE

### **Public Education Challenges**

#### **Centralization**

The Ministry of Education, established in 1953, maintained a centralized system to operate the education system in the country (ME, 2018). The centralization system causes a number of difficulties for the public educational system. The main groups who struggle a from the centralization of the systems are directors of school districts, school leaders, and teachers.

The Ministry of Education appoints directors of school districts. In the KSA, there are 13 central educational districts. However, leaders who serve as directors do not have enough authority to make critical decisions. For instance, the directors cannot hire formal teachers or build a school without permission from the Ministry of Education. As stated before, public school students reached 6 million in the KSA, and the country is vast. Therefore, the Ministry of Education is receiving thousands of issues every working day because the directors of educational districts are not allowed to make decisions, and apparently, this

harms the quality of education because of bureaucracy and the old-fashion ways of the administration.

Unlike educational systems in Western countries, the schools' principals in public schools do not have enough legal power to run schools for the benefit of students. For example, the principals have no rule to choose the best teachers for their schools. Also, principals have no authority to fire or banish ineffective teachers or staff. Therefore, many educators are avoiding being school principals because powerless principals cannot do anything.

The centralization of the educational system also has a negative influence on teachers. It is important to understand the process of hiring teachers in public schools. The process is entirely different from other countries that have effective public schools. The first step for individuals who want to work as a teacher is to apply to the Saudi Ministry of Civil Service. The second step is the team of the ministry reviews the files of potential teachers. The third step is the Ministry of Civil Service hires teachers to work in the Ministry of Education schools. The fourth step is the Ministry of Education decides where to place these new teachers. In many cases, the newly hired teachers are placed in cities that are too

far from their hometown. To make this understood, imagine a person who is from New York being employed in Idaho.

The process of employing teachers may look unfamiliar for many educators. However, it is essential to recall that the society of the KSA is collective, and nepotism plays a role in activities in this country. Therefore, it was a necessary process for the government to make hiring teachers come from one administration to ensure a fair hiring method for its citizens. The time has come to replace the system of hiring teachers from one authority which is the Ministry of Civil Service. Now, many modern technologies and fair procedures can help to recognize who is qualified to serve as a teacher, and that was not affordable years ago.

Centralization in public schools has led many teachers to work in different regions of the KSA with different distances from their hometowns. As mentioned earlier, the society is collective, and being with the extended family is essential for people there. For this reason, many teachers do not feel stable when they teach in different communities. Ten of thousands of teachers on the waiting list are waiting for an opportunity to move back to teach in their communities where their families are located, and that takes several years usually.

Centralization of public education was made way important when the government created the Ministry of Education. However, with the increasing numbers of students and schools, centralization appears to be an ineffective method to appreciate the ministry. The good news for educators in the KSA is the government is starting to examine a new practice for public schools which is similar to charter schools in the United States and independent schools in the United Kingdom. That implies the government funds private schools directly and these schools accept students with no tuition.

### **Preparation for the Real World**

Public school systems around the world, even those in first world countries, share a similar problem: these schools do not prepare students for the real world. For instance, schools do not prepare pupils to develop higher cognitive abilities, which can impact students after graduation. Public schools, including schools in the KSA, usually measure students with only one method of assessment: testing. In most cases, testing requires low-level cognitive skills like remembering information. The overuse of examinations leads students to focus only on thinking

how to survive and pass exams. As a consequence, students at critical ages miss the opportunity to develop higher level cognitive skills like evaluating and creativity.

Furthermore, public schools in the KSA do not graduate students with skills the Saudi market needs. Saudi Arabia hosts more than 12 million foreigners, many of them working in car maintenance and technology (GAS, 2018). At the same time, the rate of unemployment is increasing among Saudi citizens. If schools were to prepare Saudi students with mechanical and technical skills, the country would sharply reduce the unemployment rate. Unfortunately, public schools still do not teach the skills that the market wants, instead wasting students' time with useless information that has nothing to do with the real world.

### **Classroom Size**

In recent years, classroom sizes have become an issue in some urban public schools in the country. Classroom size does not refer to physical size but the number of students in a classroom. It is common to find a class in a school with 35 or more students. Two reasons have led to increasing the number of students in urban schools: the population explosion in the KSA and the budget of education. The number of students in public school significantly increased from less than half

a million in 1972 to more than six million students in 2017 (ME, 2018). Also, the public-school budget wholly comes from the government with no support from the local communities. The increasing number of students in classrooms lead to adverse outcomes for teachers and students.

Teachers have limited energy to meet students' academic needs, and overpopulation in classrooms is an obstacle. For instance, an English teacher plans to teach a lesson on a grammar issue, and she has 35 students with limited time. How can she explain that task to 35 students in 40 minutes with a valid method? Instructors are more likely to succeed when fewer students are in their classes.

Students are also victims of increasing classroom sizes. Some students learn differently, and these students need space to master their knowledge. Students have different learning styles. Some of them learn with pictures; these are called visual learners. Other students expect to gain the lesson's information after touching or listening to teaching aides. All of these learning styles require space in the classroom. Countless studies have shown that there is a relationship between having fewer students in a classroom and high student performances. Therefore, students should have the opportunity to study with fewer classmates to receive a quality education.

## **School Leadership**

With no doubt, principals play a core role like mentoring and training teachers in schools. Principals also care about students' safety, performances, and others. Finding school principals is becoming a common problem in many school districts in the KSA.

Some educators who have leadership abilities are avoiding becoming administrators for real reasons such as the big responsibility and the fact that so any wrong actions, incidents, or accidents in school can cause principals to face the blame of the community and officials. Also, the Policy of Hiring Personnel in Public Schools (PHIPPS) is one cause for the difficulty of finding principals for public schools. According to section five of the PHIPPS which deals with filling leadership positions in K–12 public schools, there were only two requirements to be a school principal: three years of experience as a teacher and a proper evaluation record as a teacher. Moreover, unlike school leaders in the USA, The PHIPPS showed school leaders did not receive a salary or financial benefits above those of teachers in the KSA. Therefore, fewer people are attracted to fill the job of principals where the duties are enormous with no economic benefits.

The Ministry of Education has a necessity to benefit from best practices of excellent public-school systems around the world to solve the issues of not finding educators to be a school leader. The ministry needs to create a new policy of hiring school leaders that ensures more financial benefits for school principals. Also, the board of education should protect the school leaders from legal issues as long as the leaders have no direct relations with these problems which are common in all schools in the world.

### **Teachers**

Teachers play a fundamental role in the educational process because they have a significant impact on students' lives and their academic performances. Schools' students are the future of any nation. Therefore, countries spend a substantial portion of their money to prepare their children for the future by sending them to school. However, several Saudi public schools are stuck with low-quality teachers. There are several reasons for the poor quality of some teachers in Saudi Arabia, including the way in which students choose colleges of education, the poor financial advantages of working as a teacher, and the education system.

Most students in education colleges in the country are the average of lower students in high schools. The top students usually pursue medicine and



engineering majors, which the society respects and values. Therefore, a college of education is full of students who usually have less motivation to master their major, and that impacts their performance in their future work.

Besides, through the wrong process of selecting students, colleges of education do not prepare their students to be proper teachers. For instance, instructors of education colleges concentrate on the philosophical side of education such as theories of curriculum and psychology. At the same time, professors are ignoring teaching practices. As a result, these students who will become teachers are well-versed in educational theory, but they will have no idea how to use it in the classroom.

The average income of teachers in public schools is way less than that of other professionals such as physicians and engineers. That makes highly skilled teachers leave the business and find another kind of job that values their abilities and improves their financial state. Also, public schools do not distinguish between the good and bad teachers in salary because the schools depend on seniority in the salary system. The teachers with more experience should earn higher wages than low-performing teachers. It reflects well on good teachers when they feel there is no financial benefit to being effective. Therefore, it is common to observe some

effective teachers switch to being ineffective within a few years of starting their teaching careers.

Teachers in public schools believe that they have a right to their jobs and that no one can fire them. Teachers have this belief because the policies of the public education system have protected the teachers too much. The public schools do not fire teachers unless they commit a big crime such as the sexual harassment of a student. Therefore, teachers are careless about evaluations because nothing changes whether they receive an effective or ineffective evaluation.

To improve the quality of teachers in public schools, the Ministry of Education needs to take action to solve this problem. The first action the ministry should take is to create a new system of salaries and financial benefits that reward effective teachers and punish ineffective instructors. Secondly, the ministry needs to replace policies that support low-performing teachers and replace these with policies that make ineffective teachers fear to lose their jobs. By taking these two actions, many young, high achieving students will be more likely to dream about becoming a teacher one day.

### **Educational Funding**

One of the significant challenges of public education in the country is funding. The KSA government ensures education for all citizens from age 6 to 17 years to receive educational services for free (ME, 2018). Furthermore, public school's welcome international students for no tuition. The government fully finances public schools including all elements of schools such as facilities, teacher and staff salaries, building operation costs, student books, and monthly payments for students with disabilities. Unlike governments of most countries, the Saudi government does not charge taxes on residents at all, which means that all costs of public education come from the general state budget.

Before posting some statistics on the funding of education, it is essential to realize that the KSA is a massive country approximately 2,150,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and it is the fifth biggest country in Asia. Also, it is necessary to comprehend that the education system in the KSA is not old as first-world countries since it was established in 1953. Therefore, the government is building the system from scratch (ME, 2018).

In 2016, the total number of students in the public-school system was more than 6 million compared with 432,864 students in 1972. International students in the Saudi public system were slightly more than a million and made up 18% of the

student population. In 2017, there were 26,246 public schools, 444,000 female and male teachers, and more than 110,000 personnel serving in the public schools (GAS, 2018).

The average cost of each student was 5300 dollars in 2004, and the cost is increasing in rural comparing to urban regions. As mentioned previously, the government fully fund public education. The government spent more than \$51.2 billions in 2017 on education which was 25% of the General State Budget and 8% of the KSA GDP (GAS, 2018).

### **Population Explosion**

Population explosion is also a cause of raising the cost of education which is an issue in Saudi public education system. The growth of population is increasing fast that makes the Mistry of Education build and employ massive numbers of personnel to service learning residents children. According to the Saudi General Authority for Statistics, the number of residents doubled four times in short time and jumped from around seven million in 1972 and reached more than 33 million in 2017 (GAS, 2018).

### **Gender & Funding**

It is important to consider that there is separation based on gender in Saudi educational system starting from the first year in elementary and higher level of education due to religion and traditional reason. The separation between females and males students lead to raising the cost of education of students. For instance, in each neighborhood, town and small village governments provide at least two school buildings for each level of education: one for males and another for females. Moreover, the government hires and pays female teachers and staff for female schools, and the same is true for male schools. In many cases, the cost of education for students in rural areas where a school has less than ten students reaches more than \$50,000 a year because the government, represented by the Ministry of Education, hires female teachers and staff and operates educational publications for women, and it is the same with men.

Public schools in many regions of the KSA provide free transportations for students, which leads to spending a significant amount of cash on buses and drivers. As stated before, there is separation based on gender in the country due to religious and traditional reasons. Therefore, each school, even schools less than ten students, which is a common rural area in the KSA, needs to provide

transportation, which means two buses and two drivers, so money goes into student transportation.

### **Refugees and Financial Challenges**

Another cause for the growing cost of education in the KSA is the refugees. The KSA opens its door for hundreds of thousands of Arabic refugees due to civil wars in their home countries. For example, in 2016, the KSA hosted almost 2.5 million people from Syria and more than 600,000 Yemeni refugees (GAS, 2018). The refugees made pressure on the public education system and its funding because the state schools were not prepared to host all this number of refugees who need educational services. As a result, adding more students meant employing more teachers and operating more facilities, leading the government to spend more money on education.

Funding is a real core challenge in the public education system in the KSA. The government fully supports these schools financially, and no contribution comes from the community. The main topics cause the cost of education to increase where the population explosion, the increasing number of refugees, and separation based on student gender, which leads to operating more schools.

## **Facilities**

Facilities are an issue in many public schools. In 2016, the Ministry of Education reported that the ministry had rented more than 6,000 facilities to operate public schools in many urban regions (ME, 2018). One of the reasons for the ministry to lease buildings is for increasing the number of students in a fast way. For example, in 1972, the number of students in public schools was less than 500,000 compared to more than 6,000,000 in 2017. Also, there has been an increase in the number of refugees in recent years in KSA where it is now hosting more than 3 million refugees.

The problem with the majority of the rented school buildings is that they are not suited for being learning facilities. Many of these buildings were made for residential purposes and the rooms are too small to use as classrooms. Also, the students in these rented schools have no space to practice sports like basketball. These facilities usually do not have laboratories. Therefore, the students lose important learning opportunities in these buildings. Fortunately, the Ministry of Education has a plan to replace all rented school facilities with regular school buildings by 2025 (ME, 2018).

## Chapter 6

### **General Information on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**





King Abdelaziz palace



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

## Location

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is the biggest country in the Arabian Peninsula (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], 2017). KSA subdivided into 13 regions, and each region has its capital. Riyadh is the capital and the biggest city in KSA. Located in the southwest sector of Asia, KSA is at the intersections of Europe, Asia, and Africa. KSA surrounded by eight countries, which are Jordan, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait,

the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, and Bahrain (MFA, 2016).

### Kings of Saudi Arabia

King	Picture	Term as King
King Abdelaziz (1875-1953).	 A color portrait of King Abdelaziz of Saudi Arabia. He is wearing a red and white checkered ghutra with a black agal, a dark suit, and glasses. He has a mustache and is smiling slightly.	1932-1953
King Saud (1902-1969).	 A color portrait of King Saud of Saudi Arabia. He is wearing a white ghutra with a black agal, a white thobe, and glasses. He has a mustache and is smiling.	1953-1964

<p>King Faisal (1906 -1975).</p>	 A portrait of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. He is an elderly man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a white ghutra and a dark brown thobe with gold embroidery. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera. In the background, other men in similar attire are visible but out of focus.	<p>1964 - 1975</p>
<p>King Khalid (1913 – 1982)</p>	 A portrait of King Khalid of Saudi Arabia. He is a middle-aged man with a dark beard and mustache, wearing a white ghutra and a brown thobe with gold embroidery. He is looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred green curtain.	<p>1975 -1982</p>

<p>King Fahd (1921 -2005).</p> <p>He was the first Minster of Education in 1953</p>	 A portrait of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. He is wearing a white ghutra and a black agal, with a black and gold sash over a light blue thobe. He has a mustache and a goatee, and is looking slightly to the left with a serious expression. The background is a blurred pattern of vertical gold and brown stripes.	<p>1982- 2005</p>
<p>King Abdullah (1924- 2015).</p>	 A portrait of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. He is wearing a white ghutra and a black agal, with a brown and gold sash over a white thobe. He has a mustache and a goatee, wears glasses, and is smiling while waving his right hand. The background is a solid green color with a faint, stylized white Arabic calligraphic pattern.	<p>2005 -2015</p>

King Salman (1935 -now)	 <p data-bbox="435 751 979 783">All pictures from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)</p>	2015 - now
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### **The official Religion and Language**

Islam is the official religion in the KSA. According to the government data, all Saudis are Muslims. Also, the law of Saudi Arabia is inspired by the Islamic religion. Furthermore, the Arabic the official language in the country.

### **The Society**

The society in KSA and all Middle Eastern countries is collective. In a collectivist society like KSA individuals, groups matters are more important than the individual. Young people pay much respect to the elderly, and they believe that the elderly have wisdom and knowledge. The KSA has a large number of Arabic



trips and families, and each trip or family has a leader who is well respected by all members.

The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)



Historically, tribes and families in an Arabic society mostly share similar unwritten laws on deciding about specific issues, like marriage outside the tribe or stealing. Before, King Abdelaziz's united trips had many Bedouins move together and share

water and food. Education was not a priority for the tribes; the priority was survival in the big desert where water sources are limited. Currently, the function of the tribes is less powerful now after the country was united under an effective government but still important.

### **Saudi society and western societies**

The culture of Saudi Arabia is entirely different from the cultures of western societies. In this section, I will not mention the noticeable differences such as religion, language, and food. However, I would like to focus on two matters relating to Saudi culture that many of my American friends often asked me about when I was an international student in the USA. The first topic is the role of the tribe and extended family in the personal lives of their members. The second topic of culture concerns marriage traditions, especially the fact that there is a separation between men and women at all stages of education and the workplace.

Saudis are very interested in genealogy and knowledge of the origins and history of tribes. The Arabs have written a thousand books relating to the Arab tribes because they are sacred to them. It is not unusual to find a family tree of the extended family in almost every house in the country.

Tribal influence is significant in people who live in Saudi Arabia. A person needs to meet his tribal criteria so that other tribe members will value him, which is very important in a collective society. For example, a member of an Arabic tribe is expected to marry an Arabic woman; if he does not, the member will be excluded from the group. Therefore, the majority of Arabs care about his tribe more than himself.

As mentioned earlier, the people of Saudi Arabia value their families extremely, and they live in a collective society where families know each other. Therefore, people need to keep the reputation of their families in good shape. For example, when a person conducts a crime like selling illegal drugs and is caught by the police, the society blames the whole extended family, and the reputation of the family suffers deeply for a long time. As a result, families avoid marrying anyone from that particular family that has one bad apple.

It is essential to know the role of family members inside their homes. Men are responsible for providing money and food for the females, children, and elderly members of the family. Islamic teaching makes men responsible for feeding and supporting their wives, children, parents, and sisters. Also, sons normally take care of their parents when they get old.



In Western societies, the typical way to find your life partner is through interactive activities at churches, bars, or schools. However, the Arabic society, in most cases, does not welcome the interaction between adult males and females. Families would not accept their girls or boys to have friendships with the opposite gender. It is not common for men to have female friends and vice versa.

Also, men and women are separated in all levels of education in the KSA. Accordingly, it is hard to choose a partner or to marry a person that you know well and with whom you have spent a long time as a friend, like Westerners do.

Arranged marriage is the standard form of marriage for Saudis. The husband's mother usually chooses the wife fit for her son after a lengthy procedure, which may take months. After getting married, the groom and bride start dating and learning about each other. I know it does not seem logical for my American friends to date after marriage and not beforehand. The reason is that families do not accept their girls to have any romantic relationship with boys before marriage; otherwise, that would harm the family honor, which people value very much. Sadly, the divorce rate has increased sharply in recent years among newlyweds. Part of Saudi psychologists believe the central reason for that is newlyweds do not have the opportunity to know each other before getting married.

## The Economy

Saudi Arabia economy has entirely shifted after discovering oil in 1936 by the Standard Oil Company of California ( MFA, 2017) . Before that time, the majority of Saudis were poor live in a big desert where water sources too few, and famines were frequent in some regions. Thankfully, today Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest economies in the world due to oil exports. Today, per capita of Saudis is 20,968 US dollars in 2017, and the life expectancy is almost 74 years (GAS, 2018).



Max Steineke the man who discovered the oil in the KSA

The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

## The Major Cities

Saudi Arabia is a big country divided into 13 provinces that have hundreds of urban and towns (MFA, 2017). The most important city is Mecca. Mecca is the holiest site for Muslims around the globe and the place where Pilgrims do Hajj in the first days of the 12th month in Islamic calendar. Also, thousands of Muslims visit Mecca around the year to pray in the Great Masjid.



The picture from the  
Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

The second most important city in the KSA is Al-Madinah Almonorah. In this city. The prophet Muhammad peace upon him (571 - 632) spent the last part of his life, and it was the capital of the first Islamic country at that time. Thousands of Muslims visit and pray in the prophet mosque.



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

Riyadh is the capital of Saudi Arabia and the biggest city in the country. Riyadh is located in the heart of the desert. Riyadh was the first city under the rule of the founder of the county King Abdelaziz in 1902, and the king chose it to be the capital of the country.



The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)

Jeddah is the second biggest city in the KSA. It is located in the west of the country, and it the biggest port in the Red Sea. Jeddah is the gate of Pilgrims who travel by sea.





The picture from the Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

### The Main Cities in Saudi Arabia (GAS, 2018).

City	population
Riyadh	5,254,560
Jeddah	3,456,256
Mecca	1,675,368

Al-Madinah	1,180,770
Al-Hasa	1,063,112
Total population	32.6 Millions

## Refences

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